

Jack Bryant, President, Stamford NAACP

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing
Thursday, March 19, 2015

Testimony regarding **Senate Bill 1098 & House Bill 7021**

Good Afternoon, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and the rest of the State Education Committee. My name is Jack Bryant and I serve as President of the Stamford Chapter of the NAACP.

In recent years, our organization has made the successful shift from being a 'reactive' organization to one that is 'proactive' in solving our communities most pressing issues. Today, the crucible of our age is undoubtedly the educational achievement and attainment of our children.

Education holds a special place in my heart. My experience with the Stamford NAACP started years ago as a Youth Advisor, working directly with our youngest citizens to ensure they were well-equipped for a life in the intensively competitive global economy.

In my time in this role, our team helped develop a unique SAT preparation partnership program with the Princeton Review that offered SAT preparation courses for students at a reduced cost.

Unfortunately, many of our students in Connecticut may not have the opportunity or privilege to take the SAT or attend college this year. Nearly 40,000 of our children, most of whom are African American, Hispanic and come from low-income families, are attending underperforming schools that simply aren't preparing them for future success in college and career.

We know that the biggest influencer in a child's educational achievement that a school can control for is the effectiveness of the teacher. Every student deserves to have a great teacher in his or her classroom, and we must take the necessary steps to ensure that we fulfill this obligation we have to our children.

Before you today are two bills, Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021, that have the potential to not only provide the students in our highest need districts with the great educator they need, but also foster an environment where the best and brightest teachers want to work and live in our state.

We know what the data tells us. A recent study in the Economic of Education Review assessed the test scores of nearly 3 million Florida students found that students academically benefit from having a teacher of congruent race in the classroom. Right now, students of color make up more than 40% of Connecticut's student population, however approximately only 8% of teachers and only about 12% of school administrators are also of color.

That study, and many others, contribute to the body of research showing that having a diverse teaching force can do wonders for students. If we are to truly work to

improve the academic achievement of our state's most vulnerable students, we undoubtedly must place more emphasis on recruiting more teachers of color.

We are taking steps to do just that. Senate Bill 1098, as proposed, would require Alliance Districts to include "strategies for attracting and recruited minority teachers and administrators." This is a great first step in working to couple our students with teachers that they can see themselves in, and undeniably would support the academic achievement of our students of color. SB 1098 would also require training in cultural competency as provided by each local board of education, better preparing our teachers for work in diverse environments.

In addition, the House Bill 7021 includes language that would ensure our teachers have the diverse student teaching and clinical experiences that can take them into our most vulnerable communities and build student success. This experience, in both our Alliance and non-Alliance districts, will better prepare our educators to provide a world-class educational experience to all children across Connecticut.

In order to ensure a bright and prosperous economic future for Connecticut, we must work to make sure our children have the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the global economy. House Bill 7021 and Senate Bill 1098 both foster an environment where the best teachers can find employment in our schools, and schools have teachers with the necessary experience in all types of schools to better help them serve the needs of Connecticut's students.

It is for these reasons I unequivocally support Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021, and urge the state legislature to do the same. The time is now. It is imperative that we support our students with the proper resources and support they need to be successful, and that includes ensuring an effective leader in every school, and a great teacher in every classroom.

Thank you.

Jack Bryant
President, Stamford NAACP